

July 4th Resolution Honors Black Naval Academy Graduate, Calls for House Vote Bill - July 3, 2006

Norton July 4th Resolution Honors 1st Black Naval Academy Graduate and
Calls for Enactment of House Vote Bill
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Washington, DC—In observance of Independence Day, Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC) today released a resolution honoring Retired Lieutenant Commander Wesley Brown, the first African American graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, not only as a tribute to his historic achievement but also to pay tribute to other D.C. residents who have served in the nation's wars and continue to pay taxes without full representation. Norton's resolution invoked Frederick Douglass's use of July 4th to rally the nation to live up to its stated ideals of freedom and equality. Congresswoman Norton said D.C. residents will commemorate July 4th by celebrating the service of Wesley Brown and other veterans and by reminding the nation of the necessity to pass H.R. 5388, the Fair and Equal House Voting Rights Act. The resolution said, "The best way to appreciate the groundbreaking service of Wesley Anthony Brown and other District of Columbia members of the military and veterans is to pass H.R. 5388, affording the full vote in the House of Representatives for the first time in American history."

The 79 year old Brown, a graduate of Dunbar High School, graduated from the Naval Academy in 1949, served in three wars, and retired from the Navy as a lieutenant commander. In recognition of his achievement, the Academy named a building after him in 2005. Brown was the first chair of Norton's Service Academy Selection Board, which assists the Congresswoman in nominating D.C. high school students for appointments to the military academies, and remains Chairperson Emeritus.

Norton said that Brown not only met the tough academic and military training to graduate from the Naval Academy, but prevailed over racial discrimination and physical and mental abuse at the Academy. His remarkable life story is chronicled in the book "Breaking the Color Barrier: The U.S. Naval Academy's First Black Midshipman and the Struggle for Racial Equality" by Robert Schneller.

In the resolution, the Congresswoman said, "July 4th is an appropriate occasion to pay tribute to Wesley Anthony Brown as an especially fitting representative of the citizens of the District of Columbia who for 230 years have served in the armed forces of the United States, always without equal representation in the Congress of the United States and always paying taxes without representation, notwithstanding that this form of tyranny was one of the major causes of the War for Independence which led to the founding of the United States of America." The Congresswoman said the D.C. residents who are serving in Iraq, Afghanistan and other places abroad and the 44,000 D.C. veterans who have given our country honorable service also deserve special recognition.

The full text of Norton's resolution follows.

Honoring Retired Lieutenant Commander Wesley Anthony Brown for his historic achievement as the first African American graduate of the United States Naval Academy in 1949, on the occasion of the 4th of July to pay tribute to Wesley Anthony Brown and other residents of the nation's capital who have served in the armed services and have continued to pay taxes, both without representation.

Whereas Wesley Anthony Brown retired from the Navy as a Lieutenant Commander and joined William F. Halsey, Jr., and Chester W. Nimitz, Alfred Thayer Mahan and Hyman G. Rickover with the rare honor of having a United States Naval Academy building named after him, the Wesley Brown Field House;

Whereas July 4th is an appropriate occasion to pay tribute to Wesley Anthony Brown as an especially fitting representative of the citizens of the District of Columbia who, for 230 years, have served in the armed forces of the United States, always without equal representation in the Congress of the United States and always paying taxes without representation, notwithstanding that this form of tyranny was one of the major causes of the War for Independence which led to the founding of the United States of America;

Whereas Wesley Anthony Brown and other residents of the District of Columbia continue to meet all of the obligations of citizenship without equal representation in the House of Representatives and the Senate of the United States;

Whereas July 4th is a particularly fitting occasion to remind the nation of H.R. 5388, the District of Columbia Fair and Equal House Voting Rights Act of 2006, a bipartisan bill pending in the House of Representatives recently voted out of one committee with an almost equal number of Republican and Democratic votes; and of Wesley Anthony Brown and other residents whose service in the armed forces of the United States entitles them to all elements of citizenship, including voting representation in the House of Representatives and the Senate of the United States;

Whereas Wesley Anthony Brown, a resident of the District of Columbia, attended Paul Lawrence Dunbar High School before entering the Naval Academy in 1945;

Whereas Wesley Anthony Brown served his country in three wars — World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War;

Whereas after graduating, Wesley Anthony Brown joined the Civil Engineering Corps, where he achieved the rank of Lieutenant Commander;

Whereas before Wesley Anthony Brown, five African Americans between Reconstruction and World War II met the highly competitive standards of excellence for entrance into the United States Naval Academy but encountered such harsh physical and mental racial abuse that they were unable to finish;

Whereas Wesley Anthony Brown met the rigorous academic and physical challenges of the United States Naval Academy despite racial discrimination and abuse;

Whereas Wesley Anthony Brown's pioneering effort to integrate the United States Naval Academy has inspired more than 1,600 African Americans who have since graduated from the Academy;

Whereas today, nearly 23 percent of the Academy's students are from minority groups;

Whereas Wesley Anthony Brown has remained committed to public service by chairing the Service Academy Selection Committees for former District of Columbia Delegate Walter Fauntroy from 1988-1991 and also was the first Chair for Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton's Selection Committee;

Whereas Wesley Anthony Brown was inducted as an honorary member of the United States Naval Academy graduating class of 1999;

Whereas author and historian Robert Schneller chronicled the life of Wesley Anthony Brown in his book "Breaking the Color Barrier: The U.S. Naval Academy's First Black Midshipman and the Struggle for Racial Equality";

Whereas Wesley Anthony Brown's graduation was a pivotal moment in the nation's efforts to integrate the armed forces of the United States and to improve racial conditions, and he should be honored for this pioneering accomplishment and the service he rendered to the cause of equal treatment for all Americans by courageously accepting the challenge, and;

Whereas on Independence Day 2006, the best way to appreciate the groundbreaking service of Wesley Anthony Brown and other District of Columbia members of the military and veterans is to pass H.R. 5388, affording the full vote in the House of Representatives for the first time in American history: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the House of Representatives commends Retired Lieutenant Commander Wesley Anthony Brown for his commitment and dedication to serving the people of the United States and recognizes the dedicated efforts of D.C. residents and the bipartisan work in the House of Representatives to bring equal citizenship to the residents of the District of Columbia.